MUSICAL GENRE AS A GENDERED PROCESS: AUTHENTICITY IN EXTREME METAL

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ABSTRACT

While authenticity, gender, and genre have all been studied in relation to music, the links between the three are underdeveloped theoretically. Specifically, the ongoing gendered process of constructing authenticity and the role of gendered authenticity in the creation and articulation of new musical genres remain fairly unexplored. In particular, more work is necessary to explain the role of gender in the emergence of new subgenres, in the ongoing maintenance of genre boundaries, and in fans' identity work as they construct "authentic" participation in "underground" scenes. In this paper, we examine genre as a gendered process in the Extreme Metal (EM) music scene, a popular subgenre of heavy metal. We explore several gendered dimensions of the EM genre, including the music (instrumentation, vocal style, lyrics, record covers, merchandise), live performance (gender distribution and arrangement, moshing/dancing, audience/crowd interaction), and embodied genre performance (fashion, hair style, makeup). We conclude by suggesting that the construction of new subgenres is, in part, a process of reestablishing and valorizing masculine traits, denigrating feminine traits, and connecting such traits to authenticity, thereby perpetuating gender inequality and hegemonic masculinities.

INTRODUCTION: GENDER,
AUTHENTICITY, AND GENRE

Scholars working in the interactionist tradition have long been interested in
the role of gender in popular music, including how participants construct
gendered identities via music and interpret music in gendered ways (e.g.,
Bessett, 2006; Rafalovich, 2006; Kotarba, 2002; Arnett, 1995). Such work
has shown, among other things, that music can be a source of gendered
resistance in which participants contest gendered meanings (e.g., Schilt,
2004; Leblanc, 1999), reify the dominant gender order (Schippers, 2000) or
both (Haenfler, 2004; Wilkins, 2004). Musicians and fans alike construct,
maintain, and redefine gendered identities and meanings via consuming and
producing music, as well as participating in music-based subcultures. Other
scholars (e.g., Fonarow, 2006; Peterson, 1997) have studied the construction
of authenticity in music scenes, noting that objective authenticity does not
exist; rather, authenticity is manufactured, consumed, and performed in
ongoing interaction. Authenticity "can refer to the ability of a place or event
to conform to an idealized representation of reality" (Grazian, 2003, p. 10).
Not only does authenticity in music scenes have racial and class dimensions
(*ibid.*), such idealized representations are often gendered, often privileging
the masculine as more authentic. In many scenes, men are taken-for-granted
performers and consumers of music, while women struggle for legitimacy
both onstage and off.

Just as gender and authenticity are social constructions, so too are
musical genres fluid, constructed, interactional *processes* rather than static,
easily recognized, categories (Frith, 1996). Genre signifies more than a
classification of music sharing similar compositional qualities; genre is "a set
of musical events and the social processes and communities that constitute
those events" (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 12). The process of genre creation,
maintenance, and fragmentation often involves claims to authentic
membership within a music-based subculture. New genres emerge not only
as a result of creative innovation but as part of a process of identity
construction and authenticity claims, often positioning "underground" vs.
"mainstream" scenes and "true" participants vs. "poseurs" or "sellouts."
Kahn-Harris (2007, p. 12) writes, "Genres are not, and cannot be, static," as
they are historically situated constructs that are constantly contested and
reformulated by performers and listeners. Kahn-Harris (2007), Franco
(1982), Charles (1994), Simon (1996), and Keith (1999) suggest that musical
genres establish and foster music-based subcultural spaces where

participants find community and create meaningful social identities. In short, genre includes not only the sonic qualities or commercial categories of music but also the social arrangements and symbolic meanings surrounding the production and consumption of music and music communities. Despite the conceptualization of musical genre as an ongoing process and dialogue within music communities, the gendered dimension of this process has been underdeveloped theoretically.

While authenticity, gender, and genre have all been studied in relation to music, the links between the three are less well-explored, specifically the ongoing gendered process of constructing authenticity and the role of gendered authenticity in the creation and articulation of new musical genres. In particular, more work is necessary to explain the role of gender in the emergence of new subgenres, in the ongoing maintenance of genre boundaries, and in fans' identity work as they construct "authentic" participation in "underground" scenes. In this paper, we examine genre as a gendered process in the Extreme Metal (EM) music scene, a popular subgenre of heavy metal. We explore several gendered dimensions of the EM genre, including the music (instrumentation, vocal style, lyrics, record covers, merchandise), live performance (gender distribution and arrangement, moshing/dancing, audience/crowd interaction), and embodied genre performance (fashion, hair style, makeup). We conclude by suggesting that the construction of new subgenres is, in part, a process of reestablishing and valorizing masculine traits, denigrating feminine traits, and connecting such traits to authenticity, thereby perpetuating gender inequality and hegemonic masculinities.

Extreme Metal

Extreme metal – including the subgenres thrash, death metal, black metal, and grindcore – emerged in the mid-1980s as an offshoot of "traditional" heavy metal, a musical style and counterculture that originated in the 1970s among British working-class youth (Mudrian & Peel, 2004; Kahn-Harris, 2007). Its emergence in the late 1980s coincided (though *not* coincidentally, we will argue) with the tremendous commercial success of "glam" metal bands, such as Bon Jovi, Warrant, Poison, and Mötley Crüe, and the growing popularity of thrash metal bands, such as Megadeth, Slayer, Anthrax, and Metallica. Glam metal, known for teased hair, makeup, flamboyant costumes, radio-friendly songs, and pop-rock ballads contrasted sharply with the (then) more underground thrash metal bands that

commonly eschewed makeup, wore black clothing, and played more abrasive music with yelled or shouted vocals and socio-political lyrics (Weinstein, 2000). As glam or "lite metal" bands played commercially-accessible music and had videos in constant rotation on MTV, thrash metal became the first subgenre to construct an explicitly "underground" style of metal in opposition to a "mainstream." Likewise, as thrash metal's popularity grew, further fragmentation of metal yielded other "underground" subgenres, including those within the EM category.

Itself a subgenre of rock music, heavy metal has spawned dozens of off-shoots, including glam, doom, sludge, gothic, speed, thrash, power, Viking, stoner, nu metal, metalcore, progressive, industrial, and extreme metal. The fragmentation process through which subgenres are created serves an impor-tant role in our work: it highlights the subjective meanings applied to genre boundaries both internally by performers and consumers of the music and externally by the music media. With each subgenre of metal came a series of musical guidelines categorizing bands by vocal styles, guitar tunings, drum-ming styles and lyrical content (Moynihan & Søderland, 1998; Mudrian & Peel, 2004; Purcell, 2003). These subcategorizations established semipermeable boundaries between the subgenres, but more importantly these subgenres and their placement within the EM "metagenre" allow for a unifying, authentic group membership in the "underground" (Kahn-Harris, 2007). Because of the impermanent nature of these boundaries, we can begin to understand why empirically observable differences need not be present to justify the classification of one or more EM groups at any given point in time.[1]

Whether they self-identity as a fan of primarily death metal, black metal, grindcore, or some combination of the three, EM participants typically think of themselves as "different" or "outsiders" to some degree. The concept of the "underground" is at the core of the collective identity shared by members of the EM scene. The construction of the underground/mainstream dichotomy is a process of authentic boundaries for the EM scene. The category of inauthentic music styles/scenes includes essentially all music played on popular radio, but it also includes *other types of metal*. "Trendy" metal has taken various forms, including 1980s "hair metal" (e.g., Ratt, Poison, Warrant), 1990s "nu-metal" (e.g., KoRn, Limp Bizkit, Staind), the "metalcore" style popular in the early 2000s (e.g., Killswitch Engage, Unearth, Bury Your Dead), and most recently, and most directly related to EM, the "deathcore" style (e.g., Whitechapel, Suicide Silence, Waking the Cadaver). As the definition of "mainstream metal" has changed to articulate the musical and aesthetic characteristics of the style(s) in question, so too have the ways in which individuals create and consume "true" EM changed to preserve the underground/mainstream dichotomy.

Young, white men dominate EM, much as they do the larger heavy metal scene. Previous research on heavy metal has highlighted the effects of gender performances on access to upward mobility within the subculture (Weinstein, 2000), distribution of physical space (Krenske & McKay, 2000), and perceived authenticity of subcultural members (Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 2000). Authentic subculture membership depends upon success-ful deployment of hegemonic masculinity, demonstrated through dress style and behavior at shows (both the onstage performance and "backstage" sexual conquest by presumed male performers).

METHODS

We base this research on ethnographic data gathered from June 2008 through May 2009, and, collectively, we have over 25 years of association with the metal scene. We conducted 16 semistructured interviews with participants of the EM scene in "Bluff City," a metropolitan area in the mid-South. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 37 and included ten white men, two white women, three Latino men, and one black man. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, allowing participants to speak at length of their own personal experiences. Additionally, Hutcherson observed 10 death metal shows throughout the Southeast while attending and/or performing shows in several states. While at these shows, he took notes regarding male/female interaction and distribution in the space, style(s) of dress, behavior by all participants, and conducted several brief, unstructured interviews. We coded these observations much like the interviews, making note of segregation at shows and approximate demographics of show attendees (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

At every show, the majority of people present (70–90%) were men; most were dressed in "traditional" metal garb, such as band t-shirts, black pants, and black sneakers or boots. There were generally 50–100 people at these shows, though some had as few as 20 people. During bands' performances, mosh pits – frenzied circles of individuals pushing and shoving each other in ritualistic fashion – were extremely common. Additionally, there was a visible gendered division of space at these shows, an issue that we will explore in greater depth during our data analysis.

Finally, we studied a variety of EM lyrics, music videos, and fans' responses to those videos on YouTube. As previous research has illustrated, participants use the lyrics found in metal music as sources of meaning. Dialogue around YouTube videos provided an opportunity to study interactions between fans aligned with different metal subgenres as they argued for or against a certain

band's authenticity. We coded all of the data using emergent, inductive analysis, looking for recurrent themes (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser & Corbin, 1990), especially those relevant to gender, genre, and authenticity.

GENDER PERFORMANCE
AND GENRE BOUNDARIES

Three main gendered aspects of genre emerged in our data: the gendered construction of EM music, the gendered division of space at EM live shows, and the embodied performance of gender. We have chosen these themes as they illustrate the processual construction of genre, particularly the ways in which participants utilize gender to establish authentic membership in EM and to distinguish themselves, and their music, from other music scenes. As a theoretical basis for our analysis of gender in this process, we have utilized Connell's (1995) formulation of multiple masculinities, West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of "doing gender," and Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity. Gender is not an inherent, biological trait but rather the socially constructed meanings continually created in interaction "through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social sign" (Butler, 1988). In our research, the framework of multiple, competing masculinities is visible in the gender performances of EM scene members. Those who success-fully enact the hegemonic formulations of masculinity reap the dividends of vertical mobility within the scene, access to physical space(s) at shows, and subcultural authenticity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Conell, 1987). This process of constructing gendered authenticity occurs in many other music-based subcultures, ranging from hardcore punk (Haenfler, 2006) to hip-hop (Harkness, 2008). In the following sections, we will examine the intricacies of this process and illustrate how EM participants construct authentic metal as masculine, how masculinity is constructed and success-fully deployed within the subculture, and how the denigration of femininity occurs throughout our three main themes.

GENDERED MUSIC

The construction of genre and authenticity begins (but does not end) with the music, namely how musicians choose to play which particular instruments and how they deliver vocals. While genres and subgenres share

many musical qualities, participants ascribe meaning to certain aspects of the sound (e.g., tuning, type of riffs, speed of drumming, vocal style, etc.), meaning often framed in gendered terms. Participants in the EM scene expect "authentic" metal to be "brutal" (vocals primarily screamed, shouted, or grunted rather than sung in the traditional sense),[2] guitars tuned low and heavily distorted, and the drumming to be fast and extremely precise, virtually the musical antithesis of radio-friendly music.

While pop music has always featured "unmanly" male performers adored especially by female fans (such as Barry Manilow, Michael Jackson, and *American Idol* contestants Clay Aiken and Adam Lambert) (Smith, 2006), participants seem to *want* women to dislike EM. Standing outside a show lamenting how EM has changed, Juan, a 35-year-old scene veteran, exemplified both how perceived genre transgressions can upset EM fans and how fans express their disappointment in gendered terms:

> Metal's gotten gay, you know? I don't mean it's about fucking some dude in the ass or anything, though there are probably bands that sing about that. It's just … metal used to be about being *tough*, you know? If you were a metalhead, you were fucking tough man! You could be gay and still be tough – look at Rob Halford. Back in the 80s man, even after everyone knew he was gay, we all still thought he was a fucking badass, man. Fucking spikes, leather, just metal as fuck. But now? All these kids with their swoopy hair and bullshit trying to play metal, it's gay man. It's not even metal anymore.

Juan bemoans new metal bands' look (e.g., swoopy hair, discussed more below), but he is also disgusted with the musical turn of many newer metal subgenres, such as metalcore and deathcore, wherein the instrumentation and vocal delivery are seen as inauthentic just as the aesthetics of these newcomers are denigrated as "gay." And while Halford's trademark falsetto is a far cry from the growls of bands, such as Cannibal Corpse and Dying Fetus, his historical location (as one of the forefathers of heavy metal) combined with his embodied gender performance ("fucking tough") posit him in the league of authentic metal performers. Conversely, the sing/scream formula employed by a great number of contemporary popular metal bands is often met with disdain by fans such as Juan, as is the perceived simplification or "dumbing down" of metal music in order to achieve greater commercial success.

The derogatory terms used to describe the "new" face of metal exemplify the gendered construction of boundaries used by members within the EM scene to distinguish themselves from others, as well as to neutralize the perceived threat of invasion by competing scenes. Participants regularly disparage "inauthentic" forms of music as feminine and/or "gay." Part of this is certainly representative of the trend in larger society to use of terms

like "gay," "fag," and "pussy" to denigrate everything from sports to clothing to music (Pascoe, 2007). Weinstein's (2000) assertion that "head-bangers are notoriously homophobic" (p. 105) is still accurate and often takes the form of derogatory language that is intended to denigrate "other forms of music and … acts that display the slightest hint of ambisexuality" (p. 105). They conflate gender and sexual identity, using homophobic language to boost their own and undermine others' masculinity and thus authenticity. In a YouTube exchange, Cannibal Corpse fan "PanterAFreak" critiques Australian metalcore band Parkway Drive's musicianship in starkly gendered terms typical of: "parkway drive a bunch of fags trying to be hardcore by palm muting open strings and using shitty screaming vocals." Another poster disparages a British deathcore band's vocal style: "bring me the horizon is faggoty screamo shit dude. Your[3] just a pussy." Such homophobia manifests because the perceived femininity undermines part of the appeal of "real" metal; with the popularization of offshoots of metal (i.e., nu-metal, metalcore, deathcore) comes the feminization or watering-down of metal as a whole. The "unmanly" men in the inauthentic, or "gay," metal bands are seen as threats to "real" metal musicians (Smith, 2006).

   Musical choices result not only from musicians' creativity but also from their perceptions of popular music at the time. While death metal bands often value technicality more so than black metal or grindcore bands, guitar solos and technical proficiency are not uncommon in songs from bands in different genres. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, when guitar "wanking" (extravagant, gratuitous guitar playing) and sexualized lyrics (Weinstein, 2000) were defining characteristics of "lite" metal, many bands from all EM subcategories chose to either eschew them entirely (e.g., Napalm Death) or to opt for more atonal, experimental lead passages (e.g., Cannibal Corpse, Slayer, Morbid Angel) while focusing on violent, gory, or politically controversial lyrical topics (e.g., Slayer, Cannibal Corpse). Similarly, when the grunge bands of the 1990s and the nu-metal bands of the early 2000s featured little or no lead guitar work (Mudrian & Peel, 2004), technical lead guitar work came back into favor. "Man, I remember when grunge showed up and everyone started hating guitar solos" remembers 37-year-old Andrew, a vocalist in a Bluff City EM outfit. "I went to band practice the day after I heard Nirvana for the first time and told our guitarists 'we need a solo in every song.' I wanted to be as far away from that lame bullshit as possible [laughs]." Andrew's denigration of mainstream music as "lame bullshit," illustrates the ongoing process of authenticity construction via dismissal of weak, "lame," and, by implication, *not-masculine* forms of music.

The lyrics in EM, while often highly controversial, have also been a means of maintaining genre boundaries in metal. While more mainstream metal bands have written lyrics on adolescent alienation, relationships, and depression, EM lyrics have provided a way of differentiating between underground and (relatively) commercial groups. "Look at [black metal] bands like Darkthrone or Weakling. Look at fuckin' Cannibal [Corpse] or Entombed. They don't sing about 'oh look how sad and fuckin' lame I am'" offers Sam. "Our lyrics are fucking evil. That might sound funny, but I'm absolutely serious. We're not here to talk about how sad it is that some bitch fucked your best friend or how sad it is that you're a virgin. That's not metal." Andrew offered a similar opinion:

> Look, when I was a teenager and felt like a sad little outsider, I could put on Death or Testament and go somewhere else. I wasn't looking to empathize with them, and I wasn't looking for someone like [Testament singer] Chuck Billy to be my guiding light. The bands I listened to had stuff they were pissed off about, or that they were afraid of … not being lonely or sad, but nuclear war, demons, heavy fuckin' shit! [laughs]

EM participants denigrate pop and "emo" lyrics, casting them in feminine terms, while glorifying EM lyrics for being "dark," "evil," "brutal," or "tough," or for dealing with "serious" topics; emotions (aside from anger), equated with femininity, are viewed as less authentic.

EM lyricists regularly seek to shock and disturb "mainstream" sensibilities. Black metal lyrics often contain pagan, Satanic, or simply anti-Christian themes as the song "Destruction to the Throne of God" by Kult ov Azazel demonstrates: "Renounce the putrid body of Christ/The one condemned to wear a crown of thorns/Praise be given to the great Black Goat/Faceless one that walks in the night." Napalm Death, one of the earliest grindcore bands, has remained one of the most heavily politicized bands in EM, as is evident in the song "Diplomatic Immunity": "Selective memory and distorted words/The methods of the untouchable/Struts away and dusts off his gun/To cast more net on his 'axis of evil'/Make the cowboy killer's day/Prays on all your lethargy/Knows you'll turn the other cheek." Iconic death metal band Cannibal Corpse has perhaps the most violent and misogynist songs, such as "I Cum Blood," "Fucked with a Knife," and "Stripped, Raped and Strangled." In these songs, as well as others, the female body is constructed as an object to be violently ravaged and conquered, even after death. Similarly, many of Carcass's lyrics utilize medical terminology, vivid descriptions of dismemberment, and grotesque bodily functions, as in "Regurgitation of Giblets": "Coughing up

a mixture/Of mucus, phlegm and bile/The sordid sight of burning flesh/ … Your stomach is reviled."

The meanings given to lyrics that are ripe with masculinist imagery and ideology illustrate the way in which the creation of EM music is a gendered process. This is a reality made clear not only by the male participants, but by women as well. Said 19-year-old Ava, "Look, if I want to listen to sappy, emotional stuff, then I'll listen to some folk music or some blues. Maybe some emo. If I'm listening to metal, that shit better be angry, evil, and not whining about … whatever. That's not what anyone listens to metal for, not real metal at least." Sam, 28, defended his band's lyrics in heavily gendered terms: "We're not singing about our girlfriends or how sad we are. We're singing about war, about Satan, about fuckin' *blasphemy*. Get some of those metalcore faggots to sing about that and take off their makeup and grow some balls, you know?" Not only do EM fans disparage "whiny" or "emo" lyrics and the "faggots" that write and sing them, they typically avoid sexual conquest–themed lyrics associated with more commercial heavy metal acts. Power ballad songs of longing for a woman such as Bon Jovi's "Never Say Goodbye" are taboo, but so are songs like Motley Crue's "Girls, Girls, Girls" that sexually objectify women. "I'm not doing this to get some pussy," said Charles, 32. "I'm not doing this to *be* a pussy [laughs]. This is about being a fucking black metal *warrior*." Further, women are rarely in the EM picture at all except as macabre victims,[4] the ultimate in female "exscription" (Walser, 1993).

GENDERED SPACE IN LIVE EM PERFORMANCES

The live performance of EM music is another area in which gender performance is both influenced by, and also reifies, existing constructions of musical genre. The gendered distribution of space at EM shows, ritualized dancing (moshing), and the ways in which the onstage performers enact a serious, tough identity through posturing and headbanging while avoiding the bravado of hair metal's onstage antics (i.e., guitarists playing guitar back-to-back, vocalists grinding against the mic stand in a sexually provocative manner) are all processes through which scene members substantiate their claims to authentic subcultural membership while simultaneously reinforcing the musical and social boundaries of EM.

In any live musical performance, spectators construct meanings related to the various spaces within a venue and acceptable activities within those spaces (Fonarow, 1995). Where fans physically locate themselves at a show

carries gendered meanings. As is quickly made evident when surveying the crowd at an EM show, the gender distribution of the crowd is informed by the masculinist construction of the scene itself; males who successfully enact "appropriate" EM masculinity are located in the "mosh pit" area of the venue, typically in front of the stage, while men perceived as less masculine are positioned on the skirts of the pit area. Women, in turn, are typically relegated to the back or sides of the venue, farthest away from the performers (the exception to this, when females enter the "toned-down" mosh pit, is explored later in this section). This arrangement is not exclusive to EM; even the indie scene, generally seen as more welcoming to female fans and musicians, demonstrates a similar gendered division of space (*ibid*.).

"Moshing" refers to the ritualized interaction of (mostly) males at EM shows, which takes place directly in front of the stage and is the most visible location for deployment of masculinity and is central to the construction of metal genres. In the "mosh pits," a term music fans use to describe the circular space wherein moshing occurs, participants enact hegemonic masculinity through understanding of and adherence to the understood "rules of the pit." Traditional moshing, also referred to as "push pitting "or "pitting," includes a variety of movements by the crowd during key parts of the performance. Individuals push each other toward the frenzied circle of violence, often swinging fists and feet in a tornado-like catharsis. While this behavior may seem chaotic and violent to an outside observer, to the insiders, moshing is a perfectly acceptable form of physical expression by concert-goers. There is generally no antagonism behind the frenzy, and when a mosher falls, those around him (or, more rarely, her) will stop and help him back to his feet. While helping a fallen mosher might seem atypical masculine behavior, it's important to remember that this violence is *ritualized*; part of the ritual is the understanding that those who are "man enough to mosh" are privy to help from their comrades when they fall, a show of brotherly regard or camaraderie. These "warriors," as Charles put it, do not leave anyone behind. The very nature of this behavior is characterized as masculine, as the expected participants are the men who enact authentic form(s) of masculinity.

Thomas, 24, described mosh pits at his band's shows as "places where you don't normally see a lot of women, or if you do, they have their boyfriend or someone there, you know, protecting 'em." This sentiment was echoed by Robert, 23, and Tracy, 19. In discussing his significant other, Robert said "I'd hesitate to call her part of the scene, you know what I mean? She's, you know … we have a lot in common, but I wouldn't call her part of this

[scene]." As a result, when she does attend shows with him, she only participates in moshing by "standing on the edge and, you know, pushing other people in. Sometimes she gets pushed in, but usually the guys all stop and help her out before she gets hurt." Robert's description of guys "helping her out" is powerful; his partner is unable to protect herself, at least in his eyes. While she attempts to participate in the form of standing on the edge of the pit and pushing other people in, she is not allowed to mosh "with the guys." Similarly, Tracy responded that she "started out moshing, yeah, but now … [I] usually just stand on the edge, maybe hold someone else's beer while they [get in the pit]." Tracy seems to accept her relegation to the fringe of participation within the scene, not only by standing on the edge, but by holding a drink for "someone," presumably a male concertgoer. This comes despite her description of her favorite EM band, Behemoth, as "energizing." She says that "hearing the music just makes me want to dance around and stuff." She doesn't refer to the music by using the masculine vocabulary so often applied to EM (aggressive, heavy, powerful, intense, angry, etc), a sentiment that was also expressed by Ava. "With death, and especially black metal, I just … I feel so pumped, so, I dunno, charged up that it makes me just want to drive fast and yell out, you know?" For Ava, the release of this energy comes not in mosh pits, but in activity outside of shows. Her self-asserted identity as an authentic member of the EM scene is unchallenged when enacted outside of the show(s).

Transgression, however, can occur if an individual doesn't display appropriate "pit behavior." Part of this behavior necessitates the "respect" of female space at shows, based in large part on the construction of femininity by male members of the scene as fragile and delicate. When women at shows mosh, they are often given time and space for themselves with the expectation that men will either not participate or will "take it easy" on the women. At one show in particular, an outsider violently slammed into one of the girls in the pit area, knocking her against a table several feet away. Immediately a number of other males at the show jumped on him, punching and kicking him in an extraordinary display of brutality; the band that was playing even stopped mid-song because of the spectacle. As he was dragged out of the club by the bartender, one of the male "protectors" jumped on stage, took the microphone from the singer, and yelled "Don't ever fucking come back here again, motherfucker. If I ever see you hit another girl in the pit, I'll rip your fucking balls off and stuff 'em in your goddamn mouth." The proclamation was met with screams of approval, clapping and a quick hug from the female who had been the "victim" of inappropriate pit behavior. Mark, the singer/guitarist for the

band on stage during this event, later commented that "[the] dude should've known better, man. You don't hit a girl in the pit … not *really* hit her. That's not what it's about, they're smaller than all these jock dudes and don't stand a chance against a guy [like that]." The "protector" was asserting his masculinity, and by implication his authenticity within the scene, by physically policing the boundaries as well as by proclaiming his victory in the engagement with the outsider. Male members of the scene must show deference to the females while also enforcing the code of behavior violently, if need be.

Minor variations in dancing/moshing style are significant symbolic markers of genre boundaries framed in gendered terms (Haenfler, 2004). Violation of the "rules of moshing" occur when outsiders from another scene, such as the hardcore punk or "deathcore" scene, attend EM shows, a situation that has happened with increased frequency in recent years. While in many cases the individuals may have every intention of fully participating in the show in accordance with EM "guidelines," members of other scenes may engage in "hardcore dancing." Like traditional moshing, hardcore dancing is a ritualized form of controlled violence wherein members of the crowd, almost always males, enact a "dance" that is part ballet and part martial arts. The individuals punch, kick, and jump during the "break-down" section (s) of songs, portions of the song that are characterized by syncopated bursts of notes from the guitars and kick drums, much as the moshing at EM shows coincides with half-time breaks in the songs.

To an outsider, both dances may seem similar: "Yeah, it looks like it's just people beating the hell outta each other [laughs]," said Mark. Yet EM participants view the more individual-centered, exhibitionist "dancing" as too polished and describe it in derogatory, gendered terms. Self-described "hardcore kids" deride push-pitting/moshing as "mindless" violence lacking skill or style, often negatively framing it as hypermasculine or "jock"-like. But, to insiders of both scenes, the difference is symbolic and central to the constructions of genre. "I used to think that, whether it was gay metalcore stuff or death metal, people get together to mosh and dance and, I guess just get beat," explained 22-year-old Sean, a relative newcomer to the EM scene. "But the more shows I go to, especially now that I'm in a death metal band, the more I see that 'metal' people don't like dancers and vice versa." EM fans view dancing as inappropriate at EM shows, or even at mixed-bill shows during an EM band's performance, by EM fans; the action and actor are both denigrated in feminizing terms when discussing the topic. "I would love to see … some swooshy-haired, tight-jean-wearing kid, or any of those you know … gender-fucked kids come to a real death metal show and

do their monkey dances and shit like that," said Robert. The action itself is detailed in derogatory gendered language, and inherent in its inferiority is the presumed failure of masculinity of the (assumed) male performer. By referring to the "dancer" as a kid, his maturity, and implicitly his masculinity, is being questioned.

EMBODIED GENRE PERFORMANCE

In addition to its musical and live performance dimensions, genre is an embodied process. Musicians and fans classify music according to the clothing, hair, tattoo and other styles popular in the scene. Style – including fashion, argot, and demeanor – conveys symbolic meaning not only to outsiders but to fellow fans (Hebdige, 1979). Fans may classify two bands that sound extraordinarily similar – symphonic black/death metal acts Abigail Williams and Dimmu Borgir, for example – in different subgenres based in part upon their personal fashion or style. These embodied performances of genre are present not only in the live setting, but also in promotional photographs of EM acts; band portraits typically show members in menacing poses, frowning, grimacing, and often looking down at the camera (Moynihan & Søderland, 1998; Mudrian & Peel, 2004). Of particular interest in our analysis are hairstyles, the fit/cut of clothing, colors of clothing, and the use of makeup. The meanings attributed to the "appropriate" fashion styles of EM not only highlight the changes inherent in the ongoing process of genre creation and enforcement, but also the ways in which appearance is a means of both enacting and perpetuating hegemonic masculinity.

Hairstyle is a heavily gendered aspect of appearance used to enforce the boundaries of the EM scene. Other scholars (e.g., Mercer, 1987) have discussed the symbolic and political significance of hairstyle in subcultures from skinheads to Rastafarians. EM fans quite often, though not always, have long hair they part down the middle or pull back; EM musicians nearly always sport long hair. Other males may have their head shaved or closely-cropped, or may even have "normal" hairstyles that reflect their work roles outside of the scene. Long hair as a marker of appropriate performance of masculinity is particularly interesting, as long hair has traditionally been associated with women (Kimmel, 1996). Yet EM adherents frame *shorter* hair as effeminate, particularly cuts currently popular in the indie rock scene and cuts requiring sculpting with styling products – popular in the hardcore, deathcore, and metalcore scenes.

The stylized, "fashionable" look worn by outsiders, particularly performers of mainstream metal, are viewed as "stylish," "girly," or "gay," an additional level of gendered reinforcement of the boundary of the underground. Several of our participants referred to members of other music scenes as "swoopy-haired" and "gender-fucked," defining these outsiders as inauthentic and, in turn, feminine.

The clothing worn by authentic EM scene members provides another means of constructing and enacting authentic identity and marking genre boundaries. The "appropriate" styles of dress cover a wide range of clothing styles, such as camouflage, heavy armor, denim jeans, and the ubiquitous black t-shirt. Black clothing, especially when adorned with an EM band logo or related image, is associated with masculinity within the EM scene.[5] The masculine construction of EM band-related clothing is highlighted by the existence of "girl tees." While these kinds of shirts are not uncommon at band merchandise tables and are regularly worn by women, it was not until Tracy described them as "shirts [in] girl sizes, with fewer design options than 'regular' shirts" that it became clear that EM shirts are expected to be bought and worn primarily *by men*. Women, then, are forced to make a choice: an "appropriate" shirt that fits them more tightly, sexualizing the body of the female EM showgoer, or purchasing a shirt that is implicitly *not for them*. By choosing the latter, women are "doing masculinity." However, they are unable to reap the "patriarchal dividend" of perceived authenticity and full-fledged membership.

The very concept of "appropriate dress" is contingent on a constructed category of inappropriate, inauthentic attire that is, in turn, feminized and denigrated. This includes tight-fitting clothing worn by males (popular in deathcore, metalcore, and hardcore scenes), brightly colored clothing worn by any member, and most athletic clothing (i.e., gym shorts, sports jerseys). The characterization of tight-fitting clothing as "gay" or "girlie" is particularly fascinating as countless photos exist of early EM bands in the 1980s wearing tight-fitting denim jeans and short-sleeved shirts; as the "appropriate" attire has changed to a more relaxed-fit, so too has the categorization of a particular fit of clothing changed from acceptable to "mainstream." Such clothing-related boundaries of authenticity are reinforced not only through language, but through their ubiquity onstage and off; their rule is made evident by the way in which EM members perceived authentic dress. The end result is a wide variation in dress styles that most EM fans describe as trendy, "lame," and feminine (the exception being camouflage, which is often worn by members of the EM scene).

Even when women attempted to conform to aspects of EM style, they faced scrutiny from male participants. Many men wore camouflage shorts at shows; camouflage print is typically associated with masculine settings and behavior (e.g., military uniforms, hunting outfits), so its presence in the masculinist EM scene is another way of doing gender through choice of attire. While the males are perceived as authentic, the two women we observed wearing camouflage-print skirts were not. One fellow showgoer commented that the women were "just trying to look metal and sexy."

Perhaps the use of makeup most strikingly demonstrates the role of gendered appearances in the process of policing genre boundaries. A number of heavy metal musicians have used extensive makeup for theatrical purposes; popular 1970s bands like Kiss and Alice Cooper are perhaps the earliest examples of heavy metal makeup, with black metal progenitor King Diamond of Mercyful Fate following soon after. These bands used black-and-white makeup exclusively, painting ghastly, horrific patterns on their faces. Later, glam metal bands, such as Motley Crue, Twisted Sister, and Poison followed suit, but used a broad color pallet to create a less startling, almost campy look in contrast to the dark, "evil" looks worn by authentic metal performers.

As previously outlined, "authentic" black metal performers often cover their faces with black and white "corpse paint," creating monstrous or ghoulish skull-like visages using stage makeup, Halloween-themed makeup, and even shoe polish. However, despite the empirical similarity between adoring oneself with corpse paint and applying eyeliner and mascara, EM adherents define the two situations in drastically different ways. "It's about being fucking evil, you know?" comments Sam, a 28-year-old singer of a Black Metal band in Bluff City. "We're up there [on stage] looking like horrific fuckin' beasts, with our gauntlets and goat skulls and shit … it's not some bullshit put-on-your-mommy's-makeup gimmick." Drummer Charles, a 32-year-old veteran of the scene, agrees. "Look, I've been wearing corpse paint longer than most of these girl-pants-wearing-faggots have been goin' through their mom's or sister's makeup kit." The description of corpse paint and armor by these two illustrates not only the ways in which their dress is a way of performing masculinity, but also how the way that they think about what they, as well as other performers, do on stage is a strongly gendered process. Here, wearing makeup to look like a "horrific fuckin' beast" is drastically different than "goin' through [your] mom's or sister's makeup kit."

An exchange of comments under a video of black metal band Immortal posted on YouTube illustrates the perceived meanings of makeup in black metal:

> Rokman87: I have no respect for these guys. I've said it once, and I'll say it again. Lot of faggy little goth kids who never grew out of it after highschool ... Have you even looked up the lyrics to this song? Any of their songs? They're r-e-t-a-r-d-e-d. Painting your face and screaming does not make you a metal band; just like sticking feathers up your butt does not make you a chicken – to use a very true quote.

> Demonia38857: Yeah and you sitting here criticizeing the music make you a low life. if you had the intelligence and brain power you wouldn't be here pestering others. Now go listen to your fucking faggot american mainstream bands.

Embodied authenticity is not a one-time achievement that once earned is unassailable, and a change in embodied performance can bolster or undermine a band's authenticity in the eyes of fans. Metallica demonstrates how genre classification can change over time, as they were once heralded as the archetypal underground thrash metal band, only to be seen by some fans as "sell-outs" with the release of 1996's *Load*. As much as these disgruntled fans chastised the band for *Load*'s more polished rock-and-roll sound, they equally questioned the band's new, less "masculine" (by metal's standards) look; the CD's back cover showed the band with short hair, eyeliner, collared shirts and sports jackets. In recent years, the group has attempted to reestablish themselves as going "back to their roots," playing faster songs with "heavier" guitar riffing and drum playing and comparing their new album to "classic" Metallica releases from the 1980s. This concerted effort has garnered both support and criticism in strongly gendered terms. Just as their previous musical and aesthetic changes were met with gendered support and attack, so too has their "return to classic Metallica sound" been an equally gendered event; a return to their "roots" and a reclamation of their masculine authenticity for some, while others see it as a failure to recapture that "imagined purity" (Moore, 2004).

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have outlined the ways in which EM participants construct and maintain genre boundaries through gendered behavior and expectations, particularly music styles, live performance, and embodied genre performance. At the micro level, participants continually seek to establish

and maintain their authenticity, framing legitimacy in gendered terms that cast masculinity as authentic and femininity as inauthentic. They construct authenticity by comparing EM to other genres, classifying underground scenes as masculine and ''real'' and other, often more popular, scenes as feminine and ''fake.'' As an underground band or scene gains popularity and becomes more ''accessible,'' veteran participants question its authenticity in gendered terms. These interactions at the micro level translate into macro level constructions of genre, contributing to the creation of new subgenres.

Music genres regularly spawn new subgenres (McLeod, 2001), presumably as musicians generate fresh, creative ideas. Yet the fragmentation of genres and subgenres comes in large part from the reestablishment of underground, authentic music that participants characterize as more masculine than the ''parent'' genre(s). New iterations of musical genres emerge as responses to the gendered hierarchy in the scene. At times, new subgenres reflect feminist or profeminist challenges to hypermasculine scenes, as in the case of Riot Grrrl and the original Washington, DC emo scene, both reacting to the male-dominated hardcore punk scene. However, genre fragmentation often reflects a retrenchment of masculinist ideals and a retreat to an imagined ''purity'' of the scene, framed as a return to the ''underground,'' from music, performance, and embodiment constructed as too feminine (Moore, 2004). For example, soon after women became increasingly visible in the early punk scene, ''hardcore,'' a stripped-down, hypermasculine punk subgenre, gained widespread popularity. Likewise, as women's participation in rap music grew in the 1980s, gangsta rap emerged to dominate the genre for over a decade, framed as more ''real'' or ''street.''[6] EM, of course, arose alongside glam metal. While a variety of other factors (race, for example) play a role in the emergence of new genres, participants regularly frame the subsequent divisions in starkly gendered terms. The ''underground,'' for many scenes, becomes yet another masculinist escape, the musical equivalent of a hunting lodge, country club, or sporting event, where men can be men free from society's feminizing influences (see Kimmel, 1996). This constant recreation of the ''underground,'' much like the constant redefinition of genre boundaries, is not an explicitly gendered construction; in fact, it is often expressed in anticapitalist or anticommercial language as an attempt to maintain or recreate an ''imagined purity'' (Moore, 2004). Rather, the maintenance of these social and musical boundaries perpetuates hegemonic gender formulations.

In the case of EM and many other music genres, the construction of more ''authentic'' subgenres perpetuates the hegemonic formulations of

masculinity and femininity, and through them maintains a gendered hierarchy in the resulting homosocial spaces in which these music scenes exist. Underground subgenres are perceived as raw, tough, less polished, and real while their more commercial genre counterparts and fans are framed by insiders as weak, feminine, gay, and fake. Claims made by musicians, show-goers, music listeners, and even the music media foster this process; the establishment of new genres and subgenres reinforces the masculine underground/feminine mainstream dichotomy. Further, as the underground/mainstream boundaries are historically situated, they are constantly under duress; the act of making and supporting an authenticity claim of oneself or one's band is part of this ongoing process of establishing and policing gendered boundaries.

We are not suggesting that genre fragmentation results *only* from internal gender politics; rather, we are highlighting the important role of gender in the emergence, construction, interpretation, and framing of new scenes. Musical, vocal, and lyrical styles, live performance, and embodied style are gendered in virtually any scene. Examining the *intersection* of these three processes – gender, authenticity, and genre – should prove useful in studies of many music scenes.

NOTES

1. The Polish EM group Behemoth was originally classified as a purely black metal band because of their use of corpse paint, armor, banshee-like vocal lines, and recurring use of Pagan and anti-Christian imagery. Over the course of the group's existence, their musical style has changed, and many fans and media critics now classify them as "blackened death metal" or "death metal with black metal influences," despite the fact that they still wear face paint and suits of armor and have strong anti-Christian themes in their lyrics and merchandise imagery.

2. Vocalists such as George "Corpsegrinder" Fisher from Cannibal Corpse, Mark "Barney" Greenway from Napalm Death, and Nocturno Culto from Darkthrone are some of the most popular examples of authentic EM vocal delivery.

3. We have preserved the Internet data in its original form, including spelling and grammar errors.

4. Some EM album artwork features female bodies in various stages of decay or injury. Dimmu Borgir's *Puritanical Euphoric Misanthropia*, for example, features a nude female torso wrapped in barbed wire. Cannibal Corpse's *The Wretched Spawn* depicts a woman being disemboweled by zombie-like doctors while giving birth to a pair of inhuman creatures.

5. An important note is that tight-fitting clothes and even leather were once "appropriate" dress for metal musicians (e.g., Rob Halford from Judas Priest, early Slayer and Morbid Angel promotional photos). The falling-out-of-favor of these

styles illustrates the historically situated meanings given to dress and hairstyles. A neo-thrash revival has brought the "1980s look" back into fashion for some metal fans, but for the most part it is still stigmatized in the EM scene.

6. Clearly there are many factors in the emergence of a subgenre, including race and socioeconomic status.

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DIGGING A RIVER DOWNSTREAM: PRODUCING EMERGENCE IN MUSIC

Nick Dempsey

ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates how musicians at jazz jam sessions engage in what I term "aggressive emergence." In so doing, they introduce novelty, unpredictability and creativity in their spontaneous interactions with other musicians. In order to discuss this emergence, a notion of signs in musical communications as indexes, in the Peircean sense, is developed. To produce emergence in the ongoing development of a jam session performance, musicians must produce signs that index new directions that jazz playing can take, such as different rhythmic or harmonic accompaniments, or changes to the volume at which individuals play their instruments.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes what "counts" as a sign to jazz musicians, and how musicians interacting on the bandstand use signs to generate novelty in the music they play. In jazz, jam sessions involve musicians getting together and playing compositions. These are often arcane jazz pieces written by past masters like Charlie Parker and Miles Davis, but they are just as likely to

include compositions from the Great American Songbook – easily recognized songs of yesteryear like *All of Me* or *I've Got Rhythm*. At the weekly jam sessions I discuss in this chapter, any musician off the street is free to take a stab at participating in the performance. After a band of professional musicians plays some compositions, others may either take over the instruments from the rhythm section (usually string bass, drums, and guitar or keyboard), sing, or bring their horn up – usually a trumpet or saxophone – and play some jazz.

These jam sessions are interesting from the point of view of symbolic interaction, because the varying combinations of musicians, and the frequency with which they must communicate without speaking to one another, lay bare processes of negotiation undertaken by actors engaged in joint action. While jam sessions are a place for a musician to have fun, they are also loci of intense communication aimed at producing performances that participants feel are successful. This is as true in jazz as it is of jamming in other genres, such as bluegrass (Cameron, 1954; Kisliuk, 1988). To a greater extent than practices that adhere to scripts, that are peopled by a more constant cast of players, and that rely on agreements worked out well in advance of a performance – from plays and certain performance art works to performances by jazz bands who have spent more time rehearsing together – the success of a jam session relies on an ongoing stream of musical symbols through which musicians communicate their musical ideas with one another. Conventional meanings attached to these symbols allow the musicians to communicate with one another to create coherent performances that both they and their audience recognize as successful works of art. While there is some rigidity to these conventions (e.g., there is relatively little variability to what people play for the melodies to particular tunes; keyboardists and guitarists are expected to play some chords to accompany soloists), others vary considerably based on different aspects of the context of a performance and the personal preferences of particular players.

The most important signs produced and discerned by musicians constitute indexes intending to call forth particular kinds of responses from the other musicians with whom they are performing. In these signs, musicians can signal one of two things: a player can work to induce his fellow musicians to mimic him,[1] to play rhythms, tempi, or harmonies that reproduce what he is doing, or he can call on one or more of the other musicians on stage to follow a conventional strategy of accompaniment, as when a guitar player playing certain chords induces a drummer to play certain kinds of rhythms. This represents an important advance in our thinking about interactions

between musicians. It moves us beyond a metaphor of music as a "conversation" (Berliner, 1994; Monson, 1996), beyond questions of what extramusical denotata music may index (DeNora, 1986; Keil & Feld, 1994), toward an understanding that musicians are producing indexes to communicate about the ongoing musical performance itself.

In so doing, this chapter demonstrates how this semiotic process is *emergent* in Mead's (1932) sense. The signs that these musicians produce in order to elicit mimicry are in essence unique, do not follow necessarily from the performance that immediately precedes them, and force musicians to attend to their present, to live in the moment. These emergent moments may come about by accident, based on some misunderstanding or misstep by one or more musicians. But what is more, musicians frequently engage in what I call *aggressive emergence*, an active effort to change the direction in which performances proceed, to keep the event exciting and challenging.

While this chapter follows Kotarba's (2006) suggestion that interactionist studies of popular music can inform our broader sociological under-standings of music, this chapter aims to do a bit more. Following Vannini and Waskul's (2006) suggestion that music may be used as a metaphor through which we may understand social processes in general, this chapter concludes with suggestions of how aggressive emergence is part and parcel of a number of different kinds of joint actions, from classroom discussions to business meetings.

EMERGENCE

This chapter in large part works with Mead's (1932) theory of emergence to show how certain interactions proceed through what I call "aggressive emergence" – active work on the part of interactants to bring novelty to interactions.

Some prior studies of the interactive production and appreciation of music have made use of a concept of emergence. Feld (Keil & Feld, 1994), for example, discusses the understandings that a listener produces of the music she is hearing as emergent, inasmuch as such understandings are built up uniquely for each individual in each listening. Sawyer (2003) discerns emergence in the improvisations of performing musicians. For him, we can see any moment in a jazz performance as emergent: though the notes and rhythms musicians play at any given moment are tied to what the group has played recently, as the performance is being entextualized, one cannot

predict what will be played at any given moment. The paths that the musicians follow have no preordained endpoint.

I choose to discuss emergence in the jam session in terms of Mead's (1932) understanding of the concept, which he elaborated most fully in his *Philosophy of the Present*.[2] Here Mead opposes emergence to determinism. While this is similar to Sawyer's and Feld's concepts of emergence, seeing the outcomes of social processes as non–path dependent, Mead's theory is more specifically focused on emergence as a temporal phenomenon. Mead takes pains to show that the present is always emergent. The past never completely determines the occurrences observed in the present, though in retrospect we can construct narratives accounting for how the present follows from the past – "given an emergent event, its relations to antecedent processes become conditions or causes" (p. 23). Perhaps most importantly, our experience of time depends upon emergence:

> "Real duration" becomes time through the appearance of unique events which are distinguishable from each other through their qualitative nature, a something that is emergent in each event ... What is essential to this arrangement is that in each interval which is isolated it must be possible that something should become, that something unique should arise. (p. 22)

Through the modes of signing practiced by musicians in jazz jam sessions, they work aggressively to make these unique somethings arise. They thus engage in what I call aggressive emergence. Drummer Doug Mitchell, talking about performing with a soloist, said that he wants to work together with the soloist, and compared the process to, "climbing a mountain. Digging a river downstream." Though his point concentrates more on the process of building a cohesive solo, the point holds for performances writ large as well – at all points in the process, musicians are building something, adding new elements as they go. They fill the moments with unique experiences, avoiding boredom, engendering excitement. In such stretches of time, where numerous new and challenging experiences arise, people feel that time passes quickly (Flaherty, 1999). By engaging in aggressive emergence, they make time happen. This is an aggressive move, because it forces fellow musicians to change their own playing to accommodate new presents, or to make a choice not to. Where, as we will see below, sociological considerations of music have tended to emphasize the relatively passive appropriations of musical symbols as people use music to mark time or build meaningful identities (cf. DeNora, 2000, below), the use of musical signs in interaction discussed here is a creative, agentic action on the part of interacting musicians.

MUSIC AS COMMUNICATION

To understand how aggressive emergence is produced within jam sessions, it is important from an interactionist perspective to understand the ways in which music forms a communicative system. Aside from the pure aesthetic notions that music conveys, people also "translate" passages of music into extramusical denotata, as we might with a text. Past theories have laid the groundwork for how music communicates meanings to an audience, while some students of interaction have noted that music provides grounds for communication between the performers of the music *through the music itself.* As these others have observed, and as my ethnography demonstrates, performers do use music as a communicative system, and in so doing are able both to coordinate their activities with one another and to produce original, creative performances.

Research on the communicative functions of music has frequently focused on the audience, aiming to discern what it is that composers and musicians can potentially encode in music, and how (or whether) listeners can discern those messages. Nattiez, for example, has explored music as a social fact (cf. Durkheim & Mauss, 1963), as things composed not by isolated individuals but rather within a web of social relations. Music, then, has any number of meanings for an audience, from normative aesthetic judgments to objective technical judgments, and judgments about the meaning of the work which have external referents, that is, aspects of the world outside of music, to affirmations of the interior order of the musical work (p. 103). Interactionists have appropriated this notion to draw broad conclusions as to the import of the kind of communication involved in music for numerous aspects of social life (Vannini & Waskul, 2006). Such findings resonate with a good deal of contemporary ethnomusicology and sociological research on music that also takes up the task of investigating the meanings that music has for people located in the context of their interactions with others and the world about them (e.g., Keil & Feld, 1994; DeNora, 1986, 2000). This work goes a long way toward describing just what kind of a communicative system music is. Keil and Feld (1994), for example, argue that passages of music can communicate like language, and he emphasizes that music also conveys emotions.

Such studies have established that music provides a medium for communication. But there remains considerable ambiguity as to *what* music communicates. For people like Keil and Feld, it is a cultural sensibility. For others like DeNora, it may be a personal set of references, or broad emotions. The concern of this chapter is to show how musicians interacting

on stage use music as a communicative medium that allows them to advance
the project of a musical performance. By looking at jazz jam sessions,
I describe more specifically how musical communication is possible,
the particular sorts of objects that musicians are able to denote with music,
and how such communication is largely aimed at producing aggressive
emergence.

This study thus focuses specifically on the activities of performers.
Music is, in every sense, a case of Blumer's (1969) "joint action," wherein
actions taken by two or more individuals in cooperation are based at once
on human beings' possession of some enduring meanings, and on some
meanings that are formed anew in any interaction. Only by taking this fact
seriously can studies of performers have any significant analytical value.

In this vein, Sawyer (2003) notes that indexicality plays an important role
in communication amongst musicians. This is indexicality in Peirce's (1931)
sense, where indexes are a special class of signifiers that relate to their
signified by being affected, caused by, or otherwise really attached to it.
Sawyer makes the important point that a performance is in a constant state
of entextualization, that the possibilities for making musical utterances
at any given point during a performance are in a certain way constrained
by the ongoing stream of prior utterances. Sawyer describes this process as
emergent – the outcomes of the interaction are unpredictable, emerging
as they do from the individual actions of a number of people such that
different choices at different points of the interaction could send the
performance down a number of different paths.[3] However, Sawyer is
careful to point out that randomness or cacophony is not a likely emergent
outcome – "the requirements of intersubjectivity constrain each performer
to contribute utterances which retain coherence with the emergent" (p. 88).

Monson (1996), on the other hand, notes that musical interaction is much
like a conversation: musicians communicate with each other through music
in much the same way as individuals in conversational interaction. Indeed,
this idea of the music as a conversation is a common metaphor among jazz
musicians (Berliner, 1994). Monson also appropriates Silverstein's (1976)
semiotic theory and explores the levels upon which indexes created in the
course of a jazz performance allow the musicians to create a successful piece
of music, and at the same time convey meanings to the audience. One such
level is the groove, the rhythmic pulse that the rhythm section establishes
through their interactions. Another is that of "intermusicality," where
aspects of the music connote other performances, compositions, or even
relatively less tangible things, such as the feel of particular kinds of rhythms
or timbres. This chapter lends further weight to Monson's ideas, as well as

noting that other kinds of communication, rather unlike conversation, go on through musical interaction in jazz performances.

METHODS

This chapter is based on participant–observer ethnography of two weekly jazz jam sessions in Chicago, at a club called the Velvet Lounge and at a tavern named The Woodlawn Tap (generally called "Jimmy's"). I joined these sessions as a tenor saxophone player, a grad student who sometimes augmented his income performing music, playing jazz at least well enough to be accepted on the bandstand with other musicians. On most Sundays from mid-2002 to the end of 2003, and again from mid-2005 until September 2006, I attended the sessions at the two venues, played with the bands, observed, and occasionally went to other sessions around Chicago throughout the week to see what they offered. With the permission of the club owners and house bands, I made audio recordings of the jam sessions at the Velvet Lounge and The Woodlawn Tap, and took extensive field notes. My participation and observation were complementary: impressions of interactions in which I participated on the bandstand helped clarify my understandings of how jazz musicians interact, but so were interactions I observed but did not join myself. This approach is comparable to other works of interactionist ethnography in general (e.g., Duneier, 1999; Anderson, 1978, 1990) and other sociological investigations of jazz (Becker, 1963; Monson, 1996; Sudnow, 2001) wherein participation is at least as important, if not more so, than pure observation of a social scene. In Adler and Adler's (1987) terms, I fell somewhere between being an active-member researcher and a complete-member researcher. While I was largely immersed in the world of the jazz musicians with whom I was working, I did not spend quite the time practicing that many of them did, nor did I base my professional identity on being a musician.

   To augment my own participant observations, in 2005 and 2006 I conducted 12 interviews with musicians that consisted largely of listening to and discussing recordings from recent sessions that included those musicians. Ten of these interviews were recorded and later transcribed.[4] These interviews provided more details as to the rationale behind choices that musicians make when interacting with one another, as well as highlighting what they believe to be significant musical signs to which they must attend or to which they wish others will attend.

Pseudonyms are not used in this chapter. Musicians in interviews were informed that my writings would not be anonymous, and occasionally mentioned that certain things they said were not for publication. Observations in the clubs were in a public place, and per my local institutional review board's standards, did not demand any anonymity or special protections for subjects. I choose to publish actual names for two reasons; one being that publicity is a potential benefit to my subjects who labor in the music business; the other being that in using the actual names of people and places, others may visit these clubs and see for themselves whether my observations ring true – in much the same way Duneier (1999) chose to publish the names and actual locations of the informants in his study of magazine vendors' culture.

THE MUSIC OF THE MOMENT: AGGRESSIVE EMERGENCE AT THE SESSIONS

I will now present a number of examples of musical communication from the sessions, and show that in each instance, performers are producing emergent presents. These unique moments follow from the music that has preceded them. But they also importantly move the music along, and call upon the other musicians at the sessions to follow along with them, either mimicking the rhythms or harmonies suggested by new musical utterances, or by following one or another convention of complementarity.

Melodic signs

First, we can look at examples where a single melodic phrase is intended to communicate with others on the bandstand, and where others understand it as such. This is probably easiest to see in some cases when, after the performance of a composition has ended, the musicians try to decide what to play next. Most often, this decision-making process is carried out verbally, as musicians discuss what kind of composition would be appropriate to play next, and to ensure that all the musicians who intend to play are familiar with the composition. But occasionally a musician will play the beginning of the melody of a composition as a signal that he would like to play that composition. I saw this happen at a performance at Jimmy's, when Mike Finnerty, a sax player, started playing the blues composition "Billie's Bounce," without telling the other musicians that it was what he

wanted to play. After a few bars, however, everyone had joined him – horns playing the melody, rhythm section accompanying him appropriately. On a different occasion at Jimmy's, as several musicians discussed tunes like "Half Nelson" to play, Lee Rothenberg, the youthful guitar player in the house band, played the opening line of "Au Privave." We took this as a signal that he wanted to play that tune, and began the tune after Curtis Black, the trumpeter and leader of the session, counted it in. In general, at the end of a number of jam sessions, musicians customarily play the Miles Davis composition "The Theme." This tune is never verbally called for by anyone, but rather proceeds when the person in charge of the session starts to play it. This seems to be a practice that players have appropriated in emulation of Davis, as he often played this composition to end his concerts in the 1950s and 1960s.

While this strategy is generally understood – that is, the musicians know that when someone plays the melody of a composition, he wishes for everyone to perform that composition – the strategy is not always successful. They may not agree that the particular composition would be appropriate to play at a given time, or they sometimes resist the practice as bad etiquette. One autumn evening, Mussa, a trumpet player, began to play a tune in this way:

> This time it was "Well, You Needn't." He got through the whole melody, and everybody on the stand, which was by now the original house band back together, just kind of went about what they were doing with blank looks on their faces. I guess he expected them to start playing when he got through the melody, but they just kept the blank stares. He said "Oh, the jam session's over!" and kind of laughed it off. I thought that it actually *was* over at that point, but it turned out not to be so. Randy, another trumpet player, got up on the stand and was talking with Dave and Kurt [the bassist and the piano player] about what to play. I don't know what that was all about – if they just didn't want to play "Well, You Needn't" or if they were showing some disrespect, or if they were tacitly proving some point about session etiquette, like "we're not going to just go along with whatever you start spewing from your horn – you've got to talk it over first with us."

The group onstage ended up playing the composition "I'll Remember April." This was not done simply out of disrespect for Mussa. He was frequently able to carry out this practice successfully, and was a generally well-liked individual who was seen as competent in his playing by the other musicians at Jimmy's. He had even successfully begun a performance with this technique one week earlier at Jimmy's by playing the same melody to "Well, You Needn't." This incident shows that several considerations about appropriateness are taken up when the musicians recognize that someone is

trying to produce aggressive emergence. Sometimes they exercise a right
to say "no."

On occasion the melody is used to signal the end of solos, as a call to the
rest of the musicians onstage to come together to play the final iteration
of a composition's melody, what is frequently called the "out head." One
evening I noted Curtis doing just this at the end of a performance of
"Summertime." Curtis appeared cognizant that Doug was about to end his
drum solo, as I jotted in my notebook, "CB takes charge at end," meaning
that Curtis came in playing the melody quite loudly, signaling that we
should all follow him on the out head. Notably, Curtis' use of the melody to
signal us to finish the performance was in part contingent on a particular
simpatico he possesses with Doug. While Doug would sometimes signal to
Curtis with a visual cue, such as a nod of the head, that he was ready to
end a solo, it was clear that Curtis could tell simply by listening to the arc of
Doug's drum solo when Doug was ready to be finished.

Well-known melodies, from standard compositions in particular, can
provide fodder for musicians during improvised solos as well. Since a
number of musicians share knowledge of these melodies, their use can
also serve to help create potential ongoing themes that affect how others
approach playing during a particular performance. On one level, playing a
melody can call forth emulation from one soloist of a previous soloist.
During a relatively laid back evening at Jimmy's, while soloing on "Good
Bait," I played a passage from a Johnny Griffin composition that shares the
same (rhythm changes) harmony.

> I repeated the lick several times. Didn't really realize I was doing that at the time. When
> I was done, Mike said "Swivel Hips," recognizing some of the stuff I was doing as
> copying Johnny Griffin. I owned up to trying to cop Griffin, being obsessed with one
> tune that he does, but not sure about that title. (I have it as "Chicago Calling" on the
> recording *Introducing Johnny Griffin*.) When Mike soloed, he blew the entire first section
> of the tune [eight bars of the melody], and gave me a nod.

This kind of emulation can even become something of a macrolevel trope
within the course of a jam session, as different players repeat a strain from a
particular melody. This is both a source of camaraderie, showing that we all
come to some extent from the same musical background, but it is also
seen as funny or clever. It can elicit applause and laughs from the other
musicians, much like when a stand-up comedian repeats the punch line to a
joke from earlier in his routine after some time has passed. Of course, this
assumes that a musician is in on the joke – certainly some neophytes do not
recognize certain passages of melody enough to respond when they are

played. It is a mark of a musician's competence and experience, and potentially a source of status, to be able to pick up on these things.

In shorter stretches of performances, when a player quotes a well-known melody, it can bring out responses from other musicians on stage. They may play along briefly with that melody, or provide accompaniment that works to specifically complement that melody. That was the case when Doug, drumming, "hooked up with Mike on a quote – playing hits just in time with Mike's phrasing."

Even when a melody is novel, and purely an improvisation from the soloist, fellow musicians can understand passages of melody as significant, emergent moments that call them to take action. This sometimes becomes a traditional "call and response" where the soloist pauses to allow other musicians to repeat what that soloist has just played, or to repeat it with some variation. Or the soloist may not pause, and the rest of the band will follow the shape of the melodic line he is creating, or work to provide a background that better accommodates the soloist's new ideas. In one case of call and response, I heard a trumpet player, Marquise, performing a solo on the composition "Perdido." At one point, "Marquise had a nice moment in his solo wherein he repeated a melodic lick several times, letting the band respond in between." The repetition shows both that he liked the lick, but also that he clearly wanted to change the direction in which the performance was headed. In repetition, he ensured that the other players – not to mention the audience – heard this phrase, and he gave those other musicians a chance to respond to it.

In a different case, playing "All Blues" at Jimmy's, I noted that the bass and drums followed the melodic contour of the end of a guitar solo, by a player named Jim. This involved playing a descending line. They heard his playing begin to descend, presumably aware that he might end as we were approaching the end of a chorus, and they both played descending lines as well.

We also find musicians communicating through melody when a player begins his solo with a repetition or a variation of the phrase, which the previous soloist played to end his solo. Guitarist Ari Seder once began a solo by playing the same phrase with which I had ended my solo. As we listened to a recording of a different evening, Ari and I heard him similarly followed up another player's final phrase during a performance of the composition "Bags' Groove." I pointed out that he did this, and he replied that, "Yeah, that's kind of traditional. Some people try to repeat the idea literally, the last phrase the guy played or some fragment of it. I like to take part of it and try to do something different. Go somewhere else with it." So note here – the

one player (trumpeter Pharez Whitted) played a notable phrase, moving the performance along by ending his solo, and Ari picked it up. He saw it as novel, as separable from the ongoing stream of interaction that comprised the musical performance. But not just that: He took this novel, emergent present that he has observed, and he introduced more novelty. He introduced recognizable differences and produced a sufficiently unique moment that "went somewhere else." He carried his fellow participants to a new present.

Finally, we need not always see these melodies that players use as signals to other players as calling for emulation. Frequently, they call simply for sympathetic accompaniment. A particularly stark example of this inheres in occasions when bass players "pedal," a technique wherein they repeat a single note for some time, at least a couple of measures, rather than maintaining the normal movement between notes that we call "walking." I noticed Kurt Schweiz doing this with a number of soloists during a performance of "I'll Remember April," and noted in particular that it seemed to be something that he did either in response to soloists playing outside the normal harmonies, or in order to allow the soloist the opportunity to play outside the harmony. Subsequently, in an interview with Kurt, as we listened to him pedaling alongside a soloist, I inquired about how he uses the technique:

> Yeah, that's ... another way I feel of building some kind of – especially when you come out of that now. You're kind of holding everything while the soloist is kind of building and building, and then it's almost like – it feels to me kind of like when a drummer has some kind of roll going and then like "whippp!" [releasing the roll] – rolls into a big swing and then all of a sudden, you feel like the band's taking off at that point, you know.

Harmonies

During a jam session at Jimmy's, several of us played Horace Silver's tune "Nica's Dream." But as we played, I noted the bass player was having some kind of problems playing the tune, and there seemed to be a certain degree of ambiguity about where the "one" was – where the musicians were placing the first beat of measures. This bass player was reading the sheet music for this tune from a collection called the *Real Book*. This can be problematic when performing "Nica's Dream" because the harmonic changes in that book do not agree with other written examples or recordings. Whether or not that was the cause, the bass player was not playing along with everyone

else on at least one occasion. So the guitar player, Alejandro Urzagaste, took it upon himself to put the tune back on track by playing several sustained, ringing, full chords (as opposed to the fairly short, staccato accompaniment that is the norm for bop and Alejandro). These were evidently played as a sign to the bass player. But they were also played in a way that was "musical," that is aesthetically appropriate. The passive listener or less initiated might not have even noticed that there was anything wrong.

On a different occasion, playing "I'll Remember April" at Jimmy's, I noted in my field notebook that the guitar was laying out a lot, not playing anything for long stretches of time. I was talking about this with pianist David Franklin, who noted that the guitarist was noodling for a few moments at a time, then fading out, then stopping playing entirely. The guitarist simply did not know the song really well; He looked somewhat confused. David also pointed out that Kurt Schweiz, playing bass, was playing the chords as absolutely clearly as he could, as if to direct the guitarist to play the right harmonic changes.

These examples illustrate how musicians produce musical signs that denote harmonies. And again, we can note that these signs, when understood as such by other musicians who then respond in kind, are used by the utterer to aggressively produce a newly emergent present. As when a roux, which has turned from off-white to a golden brown, demands that the cook now proceed to another step in cooking his sauce – he cannot return the roux to its prior off-white, uncooked state – so must musicians now respond to a significant musical utterance by providing their own proper ingredients for the performative recipe.

On one level, the chords Alejandro and Kurt played were symbols communicating problems in the music to another musician, but on another they were still communicating the tune to the audience. While playing over what they supposed were the correct harmonies, these musicians were communicating to the soloists that they were doing the right thing. For a musical sign to work as such among musicians, indeed, for a passage of music to count as a musical sign, it must be made to stand out from the rest of the ongoing performance. Alejandro made a significant *change* in how he played chords. The other musicians, in particular the bass player, understood that this was something to respond to, musically. It was, in Mead's terms, emergent. It created a new present, and called forth awareness and attention from the musicians who perceived it.

The act of going "outside" the conventional harmonies for a composition is itself a sign denoting harmony. During a performance of "Caravan,"

soloists were playing largely outside the written chord changes. The guitarist and bass player followed along, playing sympathetic accompaniment. The guitarist was frequently playing what seemed to be a harmony called "stacked fourths." He at least played some long, sustained chords that stretched longer than the conventional form for "Caravan" during John's trumpet solo, giving him a lot of room to breath, while leaving some bedrock there for him to stand on.

In this situation, we see the acts of the soloists signaling different harmonies to the members of the rhythm section. Having heard these melodic patterns that do not align with the standard harmonies of the composition, rhythm section musicians must play accommodating chords. This is another case of what pianist Ben Paterson described to me as "leaving most of the inside playing behind." Paterson specifically mentioned that in order to obtain what he called, "that real open, free kind of sound," it was better do so on compositions that emphasize minor chords, as "Caravan" does. Ben asserted that was the case because, as he noted, "minor seven chords lend themselves well, like sus[pended] chords, to that kind of outside harmonic stuff," (his specific examples included "Invitation" and "So What," but the point applies equally well to "Caravan"). As I have shown elsewhere (Dempsey, 2008), context matters – rhythm section players are going to be more apt to await excursions into outside harmonic territory, in part, because they know these tunes lend themselves well to such excursions. In this example, they are led on those excursions by soloists who signal through their playing that inside harmonies are to be discontinued, at least for the time being.

Rhythm

Players also communicate about rhythm and tempo. Here again, musicians focus on an indexical call for emulation or appropriate accompaniment from fellow musicians. A few examples of musicians doing so with the rhythms accompanying a composition further show aggressive emergence at play in the jam session.

One important characteristic of rhythm in jazz jam sessions, as the reader may recall, is its variability in terms of styles of music. Swing, hip hop, bebop, and other styles each have characteristic rhythms, and musicians at the jam sessions sometimes like to vary those rhythms during a performance. Drummers and bass players most often take the initiative for this variation, as they are the timekeepers of the jazz ensemble.

When someone plays in a new style of rhythm, that acts as a sign to the other musicians on stage, calling upon them to respond by playing in a style that accommodates the new rhythm.

One can often hear good examples of this changing between different rhythms at the Velvet Lounge. One evening I noted the following:

> "Scrapple from the Apple" proved quite interesting, as the drummer and Darius Savage, the bass player, began taking the rhythm into different places, making it at various points hip-hop, disco, four-beat 1930s-styled swing, and Slava Balasonovic, playing guitar, even brought it toward reggae at one point. The musicians – at least Darius and the drummer – were made visibly ecstatic by this exchange, and some of the younger musicians in the audience – particularly the keyboardist, Justin Dillard – became really excited. Justin was in fact jumping up and down with a huge smile on his face and shouting with awe or encouragement or some combination of both. The band always ended up back in straight ahead swing before going into a new style.

And on another night at Jimmy's, something similar happened:

> We played "Well, You Needn't," at the drummer, Zim's, suggestion. The hookup between Zim and the bass player was profound – and what I suppose I mean by that was that Zim would keep changing the kind of rhythms he was playing, and the bass player would move right along with him. Much of what they were doing together was playing funk beats. When it got time to do the guitar solo, they left him a lot of space, but seemed to almost telepathically understand where to place the material they did play so that they played together on their entrances.

Both these examples show variation between styles, another way of introducing novelty into the jam session. And both show that different musicians attend to this variation as a sign, and as a call for them to accommodate the new style being propagated. What is not really apparent in these short passages of field notes is that whenever such a stylistic shift is made, the soloing instruments, in addition to the rhythm instruments mentioned, must also shift their phrasing, and often their melodic choices, to fit, rather than clash with, the new aural environment.

At the end of the second example, we can also see that style is not the only aspect of rhythm communicated during performances. In that example, we see that Zim and the bass player simply made their rhythmic accompaniment more sparse, without necessarily changing to something we could categorize as a different style. This sort of rhythmic emergence, playing with the time in a relatively novel manner, was also evident at the Velvet Lounge while playing "Freedom Jazz Dance" on one occasion.

> Initially, Josh Thurston-Milgram, the bass player, complained that it was the same tempo and key as the last tune. Looking at the score in the *Real Book*, the alto sax player observed that it was in B-flat. Josh said that if it was in B-flat the book was just wrong.